

As a discipline, Ancient Civilisations is highly diverse with a rich history. It interlinks with the other disciplines of the humanities, whether they be “language, music, art, literature, theatre and poetry”.¹

Ancient Civilisations, principally, focuses on the cultures of the ancient world; Egypt, Greece and China for example. It discusses the varied natures of these people and their societal practices and beliefs that formed them into the civilisations that they were.² It is an exploration of the people that came before and how they lived in their day to day lives, how their beliefs and social norms of their community impacted them, what those social norms and beliefs were. How did their societies bury and honour their dead? How did their social hierarchies work? What deities did they worship and how? These questions are what the study of ancient civilisations aims to answer.

Ancient civilisations ties in with many of the other disciplines of the humanities. For example, philosophy, as a discipline, undoubtedly links in with the study of ancient civilisations. According to The Philosophy Foundation, “Philosophy is a way of thinking about certain subjects such as ethics, thought, existence, time, meaning and value.”³ As such, looking at the philosophical understandings of a civilisation is a key marker of what makes that civilisation itself. How a civilisation defines itself in regards to ethics, existence and meaning, shows the true core of the people that belong to that civilisation. Therefore, philosophy is pivotal when exploring ancient civilisations. Not only this, but philosophy is also a long established discipline and as such, philosophers were often exceptionally important to the civilisations of the past. Where would the ancient Greeks be without Socrates, Plato and Aristotle? These figures are quintessential to the cultural idea of ancient Greece that is held in the present day. These philosophers often worked in the pursuit of knowledge, with Socrates developing the Socratic method, which included “relentless questioning and critical examination”⁴ Plato developed his Theory of Forms, “suggesting that true reality is comprised of abstract, ideal entities (Forms) which differ from how things appear.”⁵ Aristotle was the “founder of formal logic”⁶ and therefore, these figures were pivotal to the ancient world’s understanding of philosophy. They represent a portion of thinking that was developing at that time and as such they are intrinsically important to the study of these ancient civilisations.

¹ Rens Bod, *A New History Of The Humanities: The Search For Principles And Patterns From Antiquity To The Present*, (2014) <<https://academic.oup.com/book/3506/chapter/144708156>> [accessed 13 October 2024].

² University Of Wales Trinity St David, *Ancient Civilisations*, (2024) <<https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/programme-courses/undergraduate/history-and-archaeology/ancient-civilisation-s-full-time-campus-full>> [accessed 10 October 2024].

³ The Philosophy Foundation, *What Is Philosophy?*, (2024) <<https://www.philosophy-foundation.org/what-is-philosophy>> [accessed 11 October 2024].

⁴ Catalyst by Winchester College, *10 Famous Greek Philosophers And Their Ideas*, (2024) <<https://www.catalyst.winchestercollege.org/blog/10-greek-philosophers>> [accessed 11 October 2024].

⁵ Luke Dunne, *What is Plato's Theory Of Forms?*, (2023) <<https://www.thecollector.com/what-is-plato-theory-of-forms/>> [accessed 11 October 2024].

⁶ Anselm H. Amadio and Anthony J.P. Kenny, *Aristotle*, (2024) <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Aristotle>> [accessed 11 October 2024].

Another subject of the humanities that the study of ancient civilisations relies on is archaeology. According to The Society For American Archaeology, “Archaeology is the study of the ancient and recent human past through material remains”⁷ While the study of the recent past is not so applicable to the study of ancient civilisations, the study of the ancient world would be in no way as in depth if the study of archaeology was not so proficient. Our knowledge of the ancient world would be significantly dulled if we did not have access to the discoveries that archaeology has given us. For example, the 62 tombs that have been discovered in the Valley of the Kings in Thebes, that range from the 18th to the 20th dynasties⁸ Without the discovery of these tombs, such as Tutankhamun’s tomb and Thutmose I’s tomb, our understanding of ancient Egypt would be lacking compared to the amount we currently know. Tutankhamun’s tomb was the only one to not be pillaged and so contains many artefacts that were excavated by Howard Carter in 1922⁹ These insights into Tutankhamun’s life led to much information being garnered about this time and how the kings of Egypt were buried and honoured. It gave us information about Tutankhamun’s two mummified still born daughters and his wife, Ankhesenamun.¹⁰ It is undeniable that archaeology plays a significant role in the study of ancient civilisations as if we didn’t have archaeology, a portion of the civilisations of the past would be missing.

Creative writing is undeniably a key factor in how a civilisation presents itself. The stories and tales that they weave and craft show the ideologies of the people and the things that they value. The stories that live on also tell us about who they were; they give us an idea of how the people interacted and lived as a society and where they placed in the grander scheme of things amongst other people. Aesop’s Fables are a clear example of creative writing being important when studying ancient civilisations. The fables were important in teaching during ancient Greece, often conveying moral lessons.¹¹ The history behind the fables is also helpful when looking at ancient Greece and its societal hierarchy, for example, Herodotus claimed that Aesop was a slave¹² and Plutarch claimed he was an advisor to the 6th century BCE king of Lydia, Croesus.¹³ Clearly, these stories have had a significant impact on the civilisations that they come from and are therefore important when studying ancient civilisations. Not only this, but epic poems such as The Odyssey and The Iliad are also staples of Ancient Greece and show the literary brilliance of Homer.¹⁴ They show how treasured literary works were to the ancient world. They have been preserved all this time and are still being read to this day. Clearly our

⁷ Society For American Archaeology, *What is Archaeology?*, (no date) <<https://www.saa.org/about-archaeology/what-is-archaeology>> [accessed 11 October 2024].

⁸ Margaret S. Drawer and Peter F. Dorman, *Valley of the Kings*, (2024) <<https://www.britannica.com/place/Valley-of-the-Kings>> [accessed 11 October 2024].

⁹ Jessica Brain, *Howard Carter And The Discovery Of Tutankhamun’s Tomb*, (2023) <<https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/Howard-Carter-Tutankhamun/>> [accessed 11 October 2024].

¹⁰ Amy McKeever, *Who was King Tut?*, (2022) <<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/article/king-tutankhamun>> [accessed 11 October 2024].

¹¹ World History Encyclopedia, *Aesop’s Fables*, (2014) <<https://www.worldhistory.org/article/664/aesops-fables/#:~:text=Written%20by%20a%20former%20Greek,teaching%20a%20moral%20or%20lesson.>>> [accessed 13 October 2024].

¹² Britannica, *Aesop*, (2024) <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Aesop>> [accessed 13 October 2024].

¹³ Britannica, *Aesop*, (2024) <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Aesop>> [accessed 13 October 2024].

¹⁴ Geoffrey S. Kirk, *Homer*, (2024) <<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Homer-Greek-poet>> [accessed 13 October 2024].

understanding of ancient civilisations would be lacking if we did not have access to these great works. In addition to this, the ancient world also uses creative writing in their myths and mythologies. These tales of great heroes and warnings of horrible torments gave guidance to ancient civilisations and as such tell us much about how they viewed the world and what they valued as a society. Their deities and heroes depicted in these myths were of great cultural significance to these people and so can not be ignored when exploring these ancient civilisations. For example, the ancient Egyptians had the Ennead, a group of nine deities that worked together in order to create the world and forge Egypt into a beautiful place.¹⁵ The ancient Egyptians believed in this story and many others and it shaped who they were as a people, it impacted their days through worship and influenced their views of the world. Therefore, it is exceptionally important to explore the writing and the stories of the civilisations of the past when studying them in order to be able to completely understand who they were as a people.

When studying ancient civilisations, anthropology is vital in understanding just what made the people of that civilisation who they were. Anthropology aims to give “a deep understanding of human cultures, societies, and religious beliefs”¹⁶ Anthropology plays a large role in our understanding of ancient civilisations, it aims to take an unbiased stance on the study of humans, it therefore can tell us about the people of the ancient world and how they lived and what influenced them.¹⁷ The study of humans, from the past and present, can give us a great insight into the lives that people lived millenia ago. Not only does anthropology aid in the study of ancient civilisations, but anthropology also has a vast and long history that begins in the ancient world. One of the first people who could be described as being an anthropologist was Herodotus in the fifth century BCE, who aimed to find the origin of the Persian-Greek conflict and who studied the cultures and societies that he came across whilst investigating.¹⁸ Clearly, anthropology is incredibly important when studying ancient civilisations as it gives us an understanding into how their beliefs, societal norms and expectations impacted them as people.

The study of modern history can also be linked to the study of the much older ancient civilisations. Modern history has been greatly influenced by the ancient world, with people taking inspiration from the events of the past and being inspired by the tales that these people wove. Many moments from modern history can be accredited to a thirst for knowledge about ancient

¹⁵ The British Museum, *Ancient Egyptian Gods And Goddesses*, (no date)
<<https://www.britishmuseum.org/learn/schools/ages-7-11/ancient-egypt/ancient-egyptian-gods-and-goddesses>> [accessed 13 October 2024].

¹⁶ University Of Wales Trinity St David, *Anthropology and Religious Studies*, (2024)
<<https://www.uwtsd.ac.uk/programme-courses/undergraduate/philosophy-theology-and-religious-studies/anthropology-and>> [accessed 13 October 2024].

¹⁷ National Geographic, *History And Branches Of Anthropology*, (no date)
<<https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/history-branches-anthropology/>> [accessed 13 October 2024].

¹⁸ National Geographic, *History And Branches Of Anthropology*, (no date)
<<https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/history-branches-anthropology/>> [accessed 13 October 2024].

civilisations. For example, the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in 1922 by Howard Carter¹⁹ which sparked much interest in the ancient world, in particular Egypt. Thanks to the discovery of Tutankhamun's tomb in modern history, there was a new found interest in the study of ancient civilisations. Modern history had been influenced by the ancient civilisations of the world, many great leaders of the modern day have modelled themselves after figures such as Alexander the Great and other leaders from the past. Therefore, the study of ancient civilisations can not be complete without seeing the impact that it had on the present day.

Religious studies is highly important when looking at ancient civilisations. Religion was often a key aspect of daily life in these civilisations, whether they be Greek, Roman, Egyptian or other. Religion dictated what happened in day to day life, it influenced the people's cultural and societal views. Greece had the olympians, a pantheon of gods who were worshipped and represented different aspects of life. It contained figures like Zeus, the king of the gods, who was often a central part of mythologies, such as the story of Heracles and his roman counterpart, Hercules. As well as others such as Dionysus, Aphrodite, Apollo and many others. These deities often were used to explain the uncertainties of the world and therefore show how the ancient Greeks were attempting to understand the world as a whole.²⁰ The Romans, whilst having a similar pantheon to the Greeks, with many deities featuring in both pantheons, were also distinct in their worship. They had gods of their own that did not feature in the Greek pantheon, such as Janus, the deity of passages. They also believed that their deities helped to found their civilisation.²¹ Their deities influenced their views of the world and their place as a civilisation. The ancient Egyptians had the Ennead, a group of nine deities whom they believed created the world and Egypt. The Ennead included figures such as Ra, Osiris and Isis. All of whom were significantly important to the Egyptian people, they built temples to them such as The Great Temple of Osiris²². Clearly, religion was greatly important to the civilisations of the ancient world, influencing their lives and views and therefore is important to think about when studying these cultures.

In conclusion, without the study of the other humanities disciplines, it would be impossible to have a rounded view of the ancient civilisations. Without philosophy, we wouldn't understand their perception of the world and their views. Without archaeology, we wouldn't know nearly as much about their day to day lives. Without creative writing, we wouldn't know what they thought of the world and what things they valued through their stories. Without anthropology, we wouldn't be able to interpret who they were as a people through our discoveries. Without the study of modern history, we wouldn't be able to see the impact that these civilisations had had

¹⁹ Jessica Brain, *Howard Carter And The Discovery Of Tutankhamun's Tomb*, (2023)
<<https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/Howard-Carter-Tutankhamun/>> [accessed 13 October 2024].

²⁰ Richard Pallardy, *12 Greek Gods And Goddesses*, (2014)
<<https://www.britannica.com/list/12-greek-gods-and-goddesses>> [accessed 13 October 2024].

²¹ National Geographic, *The Gods And Goddesses Of Ancient Rome*, (no date)
<<https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/gods-and-goddesses-ancient-rome/>> [accessed 13 October 2024].

²² Madain Project, *Great Temple Of Osiris At Taposiris Magna*, (no date)
<https://madainproject.com/great_temple_of_osiris_at_taposiris_magna> [accessed 13 October 2024].

on us in the present day. And without religious studies, we wouldn't be able to understand how their beliefs and deities impacted them in their day to day lives. It is therefore obvious that you need to look at the humanities as a whole when studying anything in order to see the full picture being painted.

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